

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 3, 2021

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) take immediate steps to update the handling and care standards for captive marine mammals and ensure such standards reflect the most up-to-date science.

Nearly four decades have passed since the USDA last updated key elements of the handling and care standards for marine mammals in 1984. Since then, significant progress has been made in marine mammal biology and ecology, which should inform federal care regulations, such as increasing minimum space requirements, establishing species-specific ambient temperature ranges, and mitigating the effects of noise.

Updating the minimum space requirements is especially critical to improve the welfare of captive marine mammals. Research within the past 20 years indicates that marine mammals in the wild move far more widely than was previously understood, including diving to astounding depths. For example, a 2015 study by researchers at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and University of Washington Seattle found that belugas routinely dive to 2,000 feet, yet the current minimum required depth for this species in captivity is only 7 feet.

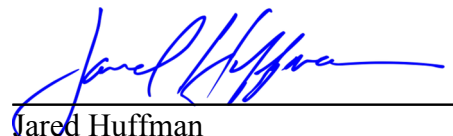
Urgent action is needed to ensure the approximately 1,400 captive marine mammals are adequately protected. We urge you to prioritize the development of a humane and science-based rule to modernize the outdated marine mammal regulations for these highly intelligent and social animals.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your prompt response.


Sincerely,



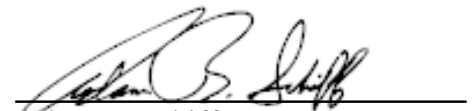
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator




Jared Huffman
Member of Congress
Chair, Subcommittee on Water,
Oceans, and Wildlife



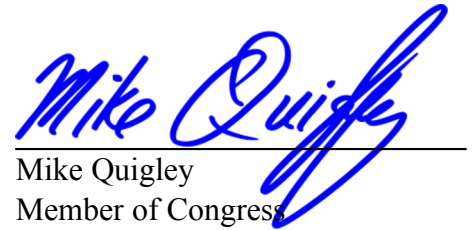
Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress




Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress




Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



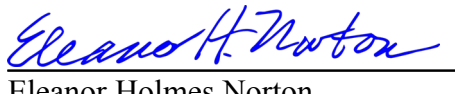
Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



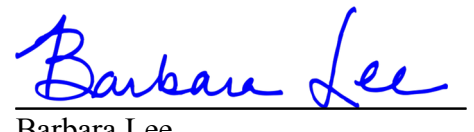
Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



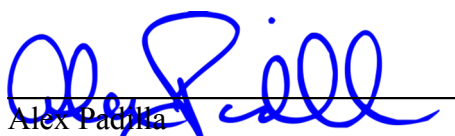
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress




Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



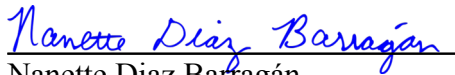
Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



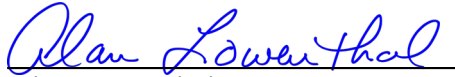
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



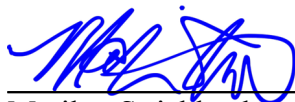
MARK TAKANO
Member of Congress



Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Ted Deutch
Member of Congress



Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



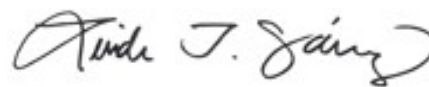
Ted Lieu
Member of Congress



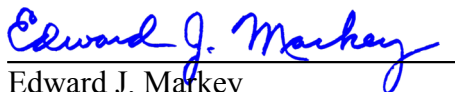
Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



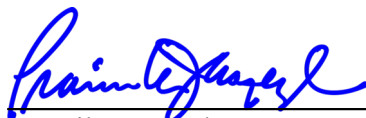
Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress



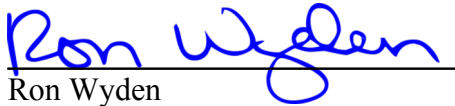
Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



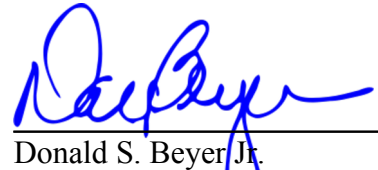
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



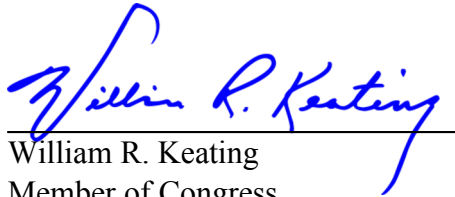
Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



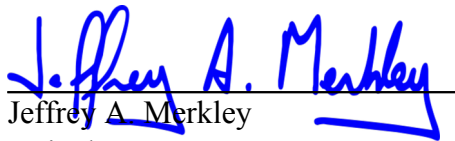
Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



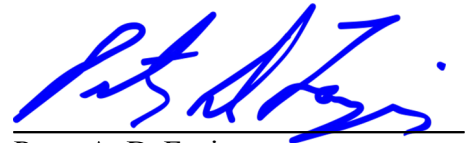
William R. Keating
Member of Congress



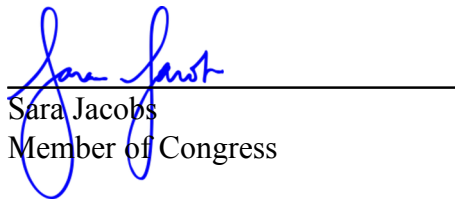
Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



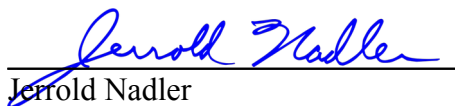
Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress



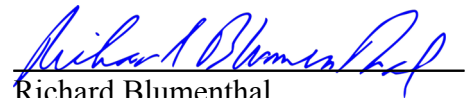
Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



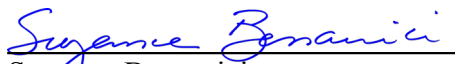
Adam Smith
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress